



Appropriations Committee

Health Subcommittee

February 24, 2022

Public Hearing on:

House Bill 5037 AAC the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30th, 2023

(Department of Developmental Services)

Good evening, Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Miner, Representative France and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Mary Pelletier, I am a Register Nurse Certified in Developmental Disabilities and I work at Key Human Services at the Director of Health Services.

I'd like to thank you for this opportunity to speak on the direction of our state budget.

I hope you've heard the gratitude of the private non-profit sector services for your efforts last year to increase funding and also the urgent need to go further to stabilize service systems that will balance on the long term plan to address underfunding.

I am here to bring forward the status of Nursing in non- profits that rely upon state funding to meet the needs of individuals served by DDS, DCF, and DMHAS. We saw the nursing shortage coming- it's no longer coming- It's HERE and is not a shortage. COVID has brought nursing to crisis levels that won't recede as the pandemic numbers do. It has created a crisis that must be address quickly and soundly to stabilize what could become years of struggle to re-gain an experienced work force among vulnerable populations that puts their health and safety at risk and the agencies that provide services.

Agencies such as ours can't retain experienced nurses amidst increasing costs of living and work expenses such as cars and gas, continued unfunded mandates added to their workloads under the same hours and wages as 7 yrs or more ago; we can't recruit new nurses into a field where they can't repay student loans, or see any benefit to longevity or where standards don't keep pace with technology in an effort to make work more efficient.

Agencies won't be able to meet the standards required to maintain licensing without those nurses.

State agencies won't be able to serve a population with a growing wait list and mission to de-institutionalize. As a nursing services provider, I get calls every week from agencies needing nurses- and I have to turn them away. They can't find nurses to hire and neither can we- there is a desperation I have never experienced in the 20 + years in this field.

I have receive call from agencies who've sought to fill positions for over a year- including my own.

Last year direct care shortages spilled into nursing duties to maintain safety- further increasing hours, overtime and exhaustion of this workforce. We need to be sure they're in place. And to do so we need your support to make compensation appropriate to professional standards as well and cost of living. We aren't looking for big bonuses, huge increases we want to be able to offer jobs and wages nurses will take. We love what we do- but those of us with graying temples make up a lot of this workforce – we have to plan now to build the future experiential base and keep health and safety alive and well.

As grateful as we are, the COLA was eclipsed by the increases in costs to come to work- it's been like a game of Chutes and Ladders. What comes in, goes out with extra- we need immediate, sound support to the financial resources in the non-profit sector- to retain and replenish an experienced nursing workforce. Please consider the increases before this session- delays may find us with little alternatives for stability.

Thank you- your service to our state is appreciated.

Sincerely,

Mary Pelletier, RN, CDDN

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